

## ***Guardez Bien***

Commentary by Diane Cameron  
on Thrive Montgomery 2050, the update to the Montgomery County Maryland General Plan  
Submitted to the County Council on December 16, 2021

***Summary: The Council must vote No on the PHED Committee's version of Thrive - and hit the Pause Button on the Thrive project. PHED Committee's version would keep planned highways in our master plans and promote zapping us with 5G. Current Thrive draft has major gaps in the role of our Agricultural Reserve and Parks system, and it lacks a cogent strategy for providing adequate low-income Housing.***

I live in Kensington, on Piscataway - Nacotchtan-Anacostan land.  
I volunteer with Friends of Ten Mile Creek, Conservation Montgomery, Stormwater Partners Network, CAP Coalition, and TAME Coalition. The opinions expressed here are solely my own.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is setting a vision for our county for the next thirty years and beyond. The question is twofold: Is this the right vision? If so, will this selected set of land use policies guide us to achieve that vision?

The vision in the PHED's approved draft is one of compact corridor cities that are "complete communities." The goals of avoiding further sprawl; redressing injustices of the past; providing decent affordable housing for all; increasing our local food supply from the Ag Reserve; and shifting from car-centric to people-centric transportation, are ones that I share. Planning staff have put blood, sweat and tears into crafting this document, and I salute their efforts.

While it contains several worthy goals, the vision in this draft is neither clear nor complete, and some have noted that Thrive's land use policies could worsen sprawl and gentrification.

*Since thorough community review and participation has not happened, **certainly not for the PHED's version** – we must hit the pause button on the Thrive project– not for a few weeks or few months, but for as long as it takes to get it right.*

Given the monumental importance of our General Plan in guiding not only "how we will grow" but also "how we will steward our lands and watersheds", and "how we will redress the structural racism of the past and present," we cannot move forward with a vision and guidance this incomplete.

\* Gaps include the lack of a full-fledged strategy for decent housing for the lowest-income people. Social housing projects and Community Land Trusts are mentioned, but without a detailed strategy for location, initiation and scaling-up, these crucial options will stay on the shelf while land prices escalate.  
**\* Thrive needs a full chapter on the Ag Reserve's role in providing local food and fiber, and another full chapter on our Parks system. Without in-depth vision and land use policy details on the Ag Reserve and Parks, Thrive leaves these crucial lands even more vulnerable to further urbanization and sprawl.**

\* The Planning Board's insistence on pushing Thrive forward during a pandemic, contributed to a lack of full engagement by all of the affected communities in co-creating the vision and direction in Thrive.

\* Thrive would add to public health hazards from electromagnetic pollution – it promotes high-speed wireless networks – i.e. 5G small distributed cell towers that expose people and other living beings to harmful radio-frequency radiation. We must delete the 5G wireless industry promotion now in Thrive,

and instead of promoting 5G, Montgomery must return to leading the opposition in standing up to the FCC and the wireless industry.

\* So, the council must vote No on the PHED Committee's draft of Thrive; and, we must hit the pause button on Thrive, so we can research, analyze, and debate the effect of the current draft's proposed changes – and to fully understand the assumptions behind Thrive's proposed land use policies, upzonings, and its multiple designated growth centers.

\* We need to be much more inclusive in crafting and co-creating the vision for Montgomery County – since our General Plan (i.e. Thrive) is the set of policies that will shape our landscape and the pattern of our daily lives, now and into the future.

\* ***No New Highways policy must be restored:*** Another problem with Thrive: On October 4, 2021, the PHED committee deleted the No New Highways policy that read: “*Stop planning or constructing new highways or major road widenings for cars.*” The PHED's substitute text would grandfather planned-but-unbuilt highways including proposed M-83, leaving them in the Master Plans while giving them “lower priority” for funding. As long as a highway project is included in a Master Plan, it can be revived and built at any time, and it's a big obstruction on our planning and funding horizon.

\* While the core housing goal is twofold – provide housing options both for “Missing Middle” and low-income tiers, the nitty-gritty focus of the upzoning is heavily weighted to the Missing Middle – a worthy goal, but separate from addressing the housing needs of the lowest-income people.

**\* The current Thrive draft lacks a cogent land use plan for providing enough decent housing – in complete communities - to fully meet the needs of the lowest income tiers.**